

The Odyssey of Dharmakara

The Origins of Amitabha and His Pure land

This poem was inspired by the opening chapters of the Infinite Life Sutra, which outline Dharmakara's (Amitabha) creation of the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.

In a time before time began,
In a distant faraway land,
There reigned a wise sovereign
Most mighty and valiant,
Honored by many as the
World's Bounty and Mercy.
Upon hearing the Dharma
Of Lokeshvararaja Buddha,
He melted into joyful repose
And cast aside desire's shadow,
The fetters of the world's cares,
And vowed to become the heir
Of the True and Utmost Way!
Thus, he abandoned his crown,
Robed himself a humble monk,
And marched forth upon the Way,
Cultivating through night and day
Until he became the renowned
Bodhisattva Dharmakara.
With profound wisdom peerless,
Faith and patience matchless,
He swiftly mastered the Dharma,
Rose far beyond the Samsara
And high above the snares of Mara.

In triumph, he sought the Buddha
And piously vowed and bowed before
Him, revering his great grandeur:

“The Buddha’s august demeanor
Is wondrous without compare,
His halo the ten quarters illumine,
Bright beyond the luminous moon
And the lucent beams of high noon,
The World Honored One’s voice
Enlightens all beings to rejoice
Within the Dharma in native speech,
And he appears to all and each
In the body of their honored liege.
I yearn to emulate you and preach
Sermons of Dharma to everyone,
Without bounds like the shining sun,
To teach Sila, Samadhi and Viriya,
The profound and potent Dharma.
Wisdom as vast and deep as the sea,
Heart neither stained nor weary,
Gliding o’er oceans of sin and woe,
To the halcyon shores of Bodhi,
Untainted by gloomy wrath,
Unfettered by lustful avarice,
And blessed with serene Samadhi.
I shall follow the footsteps of the
Infinite Buddhas who precede me
And act as a great guiding light
For the masses, to be their sight,

Uprooting the temporal bequeath
Of birth, old age, illness and death,
Always generous and ever virtuous,
With diligence and eternal patience,
Forever within Samadhi and Prajna,
Faithfully abiding by the Six Paramitas,
Bestowing Bodhi upon the dull and lost,
And lifting Sages into the Buddha host!
As he who rains alms upon the Sangha
Is less than he who becomes a Buddha
Through single-minded faith,
I vow to in diligent Samadhi stay,
And glow brightly with everlasting light,
I shall build a splendrous paradise
Unrivaled across the universe entire,
To serve as a refuge of lasting respite
For those benighted in the Samsara!
With kindness I will shatter every klesha
Of every poor soul tortured by dukkha.
I shall not waver for I am determined
To shoulder every pain and burden,
So let the Buddha be my witness!”

After hearing Dharmakara’s great
And dauntless resolve and praise,
The Buddha arose from his Dais,
Gleaming with utmost admiration
For the one before him who is salvation
To the endless many lost in perdition.
He then declared:

“Your vows are not made in vain,
For even the oceans can be emptied
By but one who bails unceasingly,
And all its hidden pearls revealed,
What is there the sincere cannot attain?
I will show you the path and Way
To your glorious and imperious day!”

And so the Buddha parted the sky and
Revealed to Dharmakara every plane
Of rebirth, each and every Buddha Land,
All the galaxies, worlds and Sagely domains,
Revealing their cities, peaks, gorges and seas,
Their prairies, hills and fertile valleys,
The villas of devas dancing in divine weal,
The nature and condition of their peoples,
Unveiling their barren ghostly ruins, animal
Kingdoms and bleak narakas most infernal.
Uncovering all of their vices and virtues,
So that Dharmakara may with ease build
A pure and gilded land of wondrous bliss,
Free from evil and woe, a supreme harbor
Of every good found across the ten quarters.
The Buddha then said: “Pronounce your vows!”

“For the relief of all sentient beings,
Including those mired in the suffering
Of hellish, ghostly and beastly rebirth,
I have built a Pure Land of true mirth,

Open to all who are willing to share my
Merits and forfeit darkness for light!
I have paved for you fine gilded roads
Of precious stones, purple and gold,
For you I have filled rivers and lakes
With cool azure waters of soft ripples,
Swirling with fragrant flowers most graceful,
With beds of aurulent sand, and laid
Before you villas, pavilions and canopies,
Groves of beryl, emerald and agate trees
That ruffle and sway in the blissful breeze,
Adorned by jade leaves and scented petals,
Berries of Mani-jewels and crystal.
I give you clear skies and peerless paradise,
A glorious afterlife of endless delight,
With singing songbirds perched on amber arbors,
Humming hymns with lyrical harmony
And the most soothing of melodies!
I bless all who arrive in my land with
August, aurulent and ethereal bodies
Untainted by the greed, fear and foul odors
That flesh, desire and delusion harbors,
I bless thee with all the powers of Bodhi,
Its wisdom, eminence, bliss and glory,
Its serene Samadhi and tranquil purity!
Divine provision shall appear on demand
And so too the finery and robes of my land.
Any being who chants my Buddha-name,
Wholeheartedly abandons evil and repents
With faithful resolve, shall enter my domain

And rise to Sagehood upon the Lotus Lagoon.
I am Amitabha and my vows have come to pass!”

Upon hearing Amitabha’s august vows,
The entire assembly before him bowed,
Moved to joyous tears by his great resolve!
They beheld his unsurpassed compassion,
His merciful uprooting of all evil passions,
Granting each the chance to taste the Samadhi
Of the highest, most true and utmost Bodhi!
On this glorious and regal Dharma day,
The Earth shook in the six auspicious ways,
Gleaming gods and goddesses were seen
Gliding over the stars stroking harp-strings,
The ethereal heavens soon resounded with
Gilded notes of splendid divine bliss,
And the courts of the heavenly lords feted,
Raining down golden lilies like confetti!